

**Abstract 435**

**TITLE:** Policy Implications Related to Pharmacy Students' Knowledge, Attitudes, Beliefs and Intentions Regarding the Sale of Sterile Syringes to IDUs: A Qualitative Study

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**BACKGROUND/OBJECTIVES:** We investigated the impact of education, laws, regulations, and professional norms on pharmacy students' knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and intentions related to the sale of sterile syringes to IDUs. The sharing of contaminated syringes and other drug paraphernalia is the primary route of HIV transmission among individuals who inject drugs. Injection drug users (IDUs) often engage in these practices because of limited access to sterile syringes. Although pharmacies can be one of several reliable sources of sterile syringes for IDUs, both legal and professional regulations in many states restrict access to sterile syringes by prohibiting the sale of syringes intended for illegal purposes.

**METHODS:** We conducted nine semi-structured, in-depth interviews and two focus groups with third and fourth year students in a Doctor of Pharmacy degree program. We coded and analyzed the data based on emerging themes, using The Ethnograph qualitative software management program to organize the analysis.

**RESULTS:** Most of the respondents were either unfamiliar with or unclear about the law and regulations governing syringe sales in Georgia. After having both documents read to them, most believe the language is vague, leaving syringe sale decisions up to pharmacists' discretion. Students express concern that such ambiguity places an "unfair burden" on pharmacists. Study participants indicate the desire for federal regulations and Boards of Pharmacy to provide clearer guidance regarding policies for the sale of syringes to IDUs. Public health agencies such as CDC are also considered to be influential professional associations by some study participants. There is the strong belief among several students that the sale of syringes contradicts their view of the responsibilities of the pharmacist as a health care professional.

**CONCLUSIONS:** The data suggest that support from professional agencies such as the Georgia State Board of Pharmacy or the Georgia Pharmacy Association (GPhA) could positively influence students' behavioral intentions to sell syringes. Another implication of the data from this study is the importance of a collaborative effort among pharmacy professionals, pharmacy students, and public health agencies to address the issues raised regarding the sale of syringes. Results support modifying both the drug paraphernalia law and pharmacy regulations governing the sale of syringes. Emphasizing the positive impact on HIV prevention as a legitimate medical purpose for selling syringes could help establish the sale of syringes as an appropriate professional ethical choice for pharmacists. Pharmacy schools should clarify the status of the laws to provide students with the knowledge for informed decision making.

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